1:Arensberg & Kimball E-5 (1932-1934) 1940
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
County Clare

Ennistymon, count larger percentages (4.6 and 4.0 respectively). Here again, within the bounds of the county, the demographic peculiarity by which the old are so numerous is a characteristic of the small-farm population. The presence of large farmers in any district is enough to weigh proportions away from the peasant norm. Comparisons of occupations by age within the county yield the same result. We need not detail them here.[4]

The demographic peculiarity which gives Ireland so large a proportion of the aged in her population becomes more marked when other nations are compared. The Irish death rate is rather low. Most strikingly, only one civilized country keeping census records of age distribution surpasses Ireland in the large proportion of aged individuals. That country is France, which in 1926 counted 9.4 per cent of its citizens over sixty-five years of age, barely topping the Irish figure of 9.2 per cent. Other countries ranged far below France and the Free State, Scandinavian and Baltic countries coming comparatively near, with such figures as that of 8.8 per cent for Sweden and 7.6 per cent for Norway. Industrial Germany and England (with Wales) occupied a middle place with figures of 5.7 per cent and 6.6 per cent respectively, and such "new" countries as Australia and the United States, where the percentages are 4.4 per cent and 4.7 per cent, brought up the rear. These figures (see Table 4) were taken from national censuses of various dates in the various countries in the period 1920–1926 and compiled for the Irish census primarily from the "International Health Year Book 1928 (League of Nations)" and *Aperçu de la démographie des divers pays du monde, 1925* (International Institute of Statistics).

Ireland and France share eminence as abodes of the old. But they reach that eminence through different courses. A comparison of the expectancy of life in the two countries,

[4] *Census of Population, 1926*, vol. V, pt. II, Table 12A, County Clare.

1:Arensberg & Kimball E-5 (1932-1934) 1940
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
County Clare

made upon the basis of actuarial computations at the time of the taking of the census in the Free State, reveals this difference. In addition, it reveals a new factor in the question of age distribution in Ireland. At all ages from birth

TABLE 4

PERSONS OVER SIXTY-FIVE IN IRELAND AND OTHER COUNTRIES

Country	Population Percentage
France	9.4
Ireland	9.2
Sweden	8.8
Norway	7.6
England (with Wales)	6.6
Germany	5.7
Australia	4.4
United States	4.7

to eighty, the expectation of life is considerably higher in the Free State than in France. At five (a better age than that of birth to take for purposes of computation because of infant mortality) the Irishman may look forward to fifty-nine years of life, the Frenchman only to fifty-five. At forty he may expect to live thirty-eight years more to the Frenchman's thirty-five. And at eighty, if they both survive so long, the Irishman may hope to outlive the Frenchman by more than a year, their expectancies being at that age 5.8 and 4.3 respectively. As Ireland shows a very high expectation of life at all ages in comparison with other countries, especially for males (the female expectancies being considerably lower), the combination of this fact with her large proportion of old people leads to a new conclusion. Not only are the old in Irish country districts relatively more numerous, but they are absolutely more numerous since they live longer than in other countries. Consequently, whatever conditions produce the large percentage of old people among the total population in France, they are not

1:Arensberg & Kimball E-5 (1932-1934) 1940
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
County Clare

those of Ireland. There low life expectancies go hand in hand with a large proportion of the aged. In Ireland high expectancies, especially at older ages, where they are among the highest in the world for both sexes, go hand in hand with the same phenomenon.

For this reason one cannot appeal too directly to emigration as the determinant of the demographic condition. The Irish countryside is relatively full of old people, not only because so many of the young adults have left, but also because the old people tend to live long lives.

Within this complexity of factors, emigration, a high percentage of the old, and late marriage, the small farmers set the norms for the whole country. Now we can recognize that high expectancies of life also belong to them. A comparison of life expectancies among the three provinces of the Free State will suffice to bear out the fact. Males of Connacht can expect more years of life at all ages than males of Munster; the males of Munster can expect more than those of Leinster; and those of Leinster can expect least of all three. Thus the provinces show higher expectancies the smaller their farms.

Many causes have been advanced to account for Irish longevity. The country people live long and die often very old indeed. Diet, climate, natural selection through infant mortality, racial heredity, have all been suggested by various writers. Probably all of these factors are involved, in one way or another, but the problem is one that has faced students of peasantries often.

The authors have no single efficient cause to offer. The question that poses itself for them is one of effect rather than of cause. The existence of such a large proportion of the old among small farmers presents a problem in the organization of behavior among human beings. Nevertheless, might not the longevity of peasants be after all a simple matter? In the Irish case we shall see that they live long

1:Arensberg & Kimball E-5 (1932-1934) 1940
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
County Clare

888 because they have much to live for. In their own sphere of life, they are honored. They have power.

888 The problem is one which must be referred to the small farmers themselves. As before, it is a question of their sentiments and their conducts and any analysis of their action in the matter must follow upon the presentation of observed generalities in their social life.

Some of these generalities present themselves to the eye immediately. As we saw in the discussion of the house and family, there is a great deal of everyday conduct which expresses the differences of social valuation of age and which one age group follows in its intercourse with many others. This conduct, the sentiments which accompany it, and the attitudes and verbalizations with which it is associated, can be seen every day in the lives of the people. It is part of the *mores* of the community. The child learns it as he grows up upon the small farms. It prepares him to meet all others in the local community who are of substantially the same status, habits of life, and speech as the members of his own family. It provides a scale of valuation in which each individual can place any other within the bounds of variation existing in the local community, and upon which both can build sure expectancies of conduct. On another facet it gives each and every individual a place among individuals occupying similar places. In making status in this way, it governs behavior in high degree, imposing bounds upon it and exacting conformity. We have already seen something of this conduct. In the discussion of the house interior and the grouping and seating of individuals by rough similarity of age, we have seen what might be termed one focal point within the system of relations which is characterized by this conduct. The old people in the farm family occupied that point. Place of honor and privilege within the household is theirs. In their families they are objects of respect and a mild sort of veneration on the part of all younger members.

8:Arensberg E-5 (1932-1934) 1937
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

561 finds its most compatible and its most enduring organization. No other social disposition sets a deeper stamp upon the countryman. No other is more immediate to the observer, tourist or anthropologist. No other, too, explains better why old custom lives today.

561 888 165 Ireland is in many ways an old person's country. Where emigration carries youth away, old age is disproportionately numerous. But that fact is not all the story, for the rural Irish are long-lived. The country districts set a norm for the Free State which shows itself statistically. Despite poverty, hardship, and the erroneously assumed 'decline of rural life', the countryman lives long and dies, often very old indeed. Many causes have been sought for this strange fact, but might it not be after all a simple matter? They live long because they have much to live for. In their own sphere of life, they are honoured; they have power.

888 We remember that the household and the family centres itself in them. Their room is semi-sacred in the fairy-lore; it is the best in the house. The chair by the fire, the seat of honour and most comfort, is theirs. Even with the transfer of command up on the farm, they are objects of marked deference.

888 626 But this is more than a family matter. The old people have privilege among and receive respect from others than their own relatives. The conduct which bestows both upon them is as much the folk

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

offending person. Similar stones have been used to work beneficent magic in the case of expectant mothers. Here the symbolism may be that of the child in the womb, but there are other cases where it is obviously phallic. Sympathetic magic would appear to be the explanation of another custom, that of carrying away in a cloth and making into various concoctions, some of which were drunk, the earth from the grave of a holy man. The drink was regarded as a cure for human sins or for disease in cattle.

The megaliths themselves are known to have been held in veneration as givers of fertility and curative agents. The same virtues attach to certain solitary stones, for instance some holy wells have "healing stones" which are used to touch the affected parts of the body. Standing stones with a perforation ("holed-stones") are said to have been used in sealing marriage contracts. Megaliths are also considered the haunts of fairies, which, some students affirm, are to be regarded as ancestral spirits inhabiting the burial places and awaiting an opportunity to be born again. Alternatively it is thought that belief in fairies is a folk memory of ancient peoples of small stature. It is hardly necessary to say that belief in fairies is firmly held in many parts of the country: I have seen quite recently boys dressed in girls' clothes as a protection against fairy theft, for the "wee people" are liable to exchange their "changelings" for healthy boys—a belief which is perhaps an attempt to explain the high mortality of male as compared with female children.

It has more than once been my experience to be refused permission to excavate megalithic monuments from the owner's belief that bad luck would follow. Country people will not touch the trees that grow on ancient burial sites, for instance they will not even use fallen branches as fuel. This reluctance to interfere with the abodes of the dead provides a charitable explanation of the neglect from which many Christian burial grounds suffer. Incidentally it is worth remarking that archæologists have often shown by their discoveries that hazel wood and hazel nuts played a consider-

16:Messenger E-4,5 (1955-1966) 1969 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
(1959-1960) Inis Beag

visits ranging in length from one to seven weeks between 1961 and 1966 to complete our project. During the 19 months that we dwelled on the island, most of our research was directed toward documenting the contemporary culture of Inis Beag its technological, economic, political, social, religious, esthetic, and recreational aspects. We also investigated informal and formal education and the personality traits created by it, reconstructed Inis Beag history of the past century by examining historical materials of many sorts and probing the memories of elderly respondents, and recorded cultural change in process.

The research techniques that we employed are standard ethnographic ones: the guided and open-ended interview, external and participant observation, collection of life histories, photography, and phonography. Two departures from methodological orthodoxy were our use, as projective devices, of literary works and a sixty-two-verse ballad that I composed. A dozen islanders of both sexes and three age groups read at our request three books portraying Inis Beag culture, and we recorded and analyzed their varied responses. My ballad, now embedded in the island folklore tradition, is based on a shipwreck and rescue off Inis Beag that we witnessed, and a series of incidents which ensued during the following months. Alterations made by local singers after it was completed and the reactions to it by the islanders gave us insights into Inis Beag culture and personality which would have been difficult to obtain under other circumstances of fieldwork. I must add that the ballad was a product of exuberant cultural involvement and the satisfactions of "creative endeavor." Its research implications were unanticipated.

The Inis Beag islanders qualify as folk people in almost every respect, according to anthropological definition (Lewis 1960:1): the population has maintained its stability for at least two hundred years; there is a strong bond between the peasants and their land, and agriculture provides them with the major source of their livelihood; production is mainly for subsistence and is carried on with a simple technology, which includes as primary implements the digging stick, spade, and scythe; the island folk participate in a money economy, but barter still persists; a low standard of living prevails, and the birth rate is high; the family is of central importance, and marriage figures prominently as a provision of economic welfare; the island is integrated into the county and national governments and is subject to their laws; the people long have been exposed to urban influences, have borrowed cultural elements from other rural areas on the mainland, and have integrated them into a relatively stable system; and, finally, the experience of living under foreign rule for over three centuries has created in the islanders an attitude of dependence and, at the same time, one of hostility toward the government which continues to this day. The only conditions in Inis Beag which run counter to those in most other peasant groups are low death and illiteracy rates. The Irish shun the term peasant as applied to individuals or communities, for the same reason that elitists in developing countries eschew the term primitive as applied to traditional cultural forms found in societies incorporated into newly formed states. The causes of this attitude must be examined next.

During the past hundred years, Ireland has experienced a vigorous nativistic movement—provoked by seven centuries of English domination, linked with nationalism as the Irish sought to assert their independence, focused on the

16:Messenger E-4,5 (1955-1966) 1969 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
(1959-1960) Inis Beag

many of them have lost their lives to the ocean. Islanders are well aware of the wide differences in rowing and fishing abilities among themselves, and the evaluation of the skills of various men, past and present, is a much heard subject of conversation. Also, many men choose not to fish because they are unable to develop the requisite talents, are prone to severe seasickness, or are overly wary of the dangers associated with fishing. It seems reasonable to assume that people who spend so much time on the water as a matter of safety will have learned to swim, but I was unable to discover a single islander who possesses this skill. The reasons put forward to account for the fact are several, but the most significant one never is broached—the puritanical reluctance to bare the body either publicly or privately at any age. Folk rationalizations are best summed up in the following quotations: "Nothing will happen to the man who knows the sea.", "Better for a man to drown at once and save himself the suffering.", "The man who can't swim will take more care.", and "When death is on a man, he can't be saved."

A recurring motif in writings about Inis Beag is the threatening sea and heavy loss of life among fishermen, with its attendant psychological depression. In the past century, only four sea accidents have occurred in the island with the loss of but 12 lives. The folk are extremely cautious out of respect for the elements, handle their canoes with remarkable dexterity, and are excellent weather forecasters. The claim of one famous writer that each family has lost male members to the ocean reflects not only his psychological outlook, but the breadth and depth of kinship reckoning and the high degree of inbreeding—as an islander told me, "Every Inis Beag family is related, and the drowned man might have been eight-of-kin (third cousin) who died 60 years ago." The motif can be attributed to the projection of a tragic world view into the interpretation of the local culture by some authors, to the nativistic and primitivistic biases of other writers, and to a common sense conclusion reached by observers who have spent little time in the island and have failed to "count noses."

Diet

The diet of the islanders is simple, and only one large meal is eaten during the day. After the turf fire is rekindled from coals and water is boiled for tea, the family assembles for a breakfast which includes bread spread with butter and jam and tea mixed with ample amounts of milk and sugar. Dinner at noon and lunches in the late afternoon and before retiring at night feature the same ingredients, although a boiled or fried egg usually is added to the dinner menu. The supper, eaten between seven and eight o'clock in the summer and an hour or two earlier during the winter, is the main meal when the family once again is united, and at this time boiled potatoes and vegetables, and meat if available, dominate the menu. Again bread and tea are served, and a dessert, or "sweet"—such as custard, rhubarb, blancmange, or biscuits—may be added. Children of school age in a family eat together at noon and after school and may be joined by their father, but his duties often absent him from one or both of these meals, and he may carry bread and tea

16:Messenger E-4,5 (1955-1966) 1969 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
(1959-1960) Inis Beag

and the never ending toil needed to maintain present subsistence standards; the spying and malicious gossiping of their fellows and the ubiquity of jealousy and envy; the isolation of the island, particularly during winter months; numbing boredom and the dearth of social activities; for women, the lack of freedom and of attention and affection from their spouses, as well as the necessity of enduring sexual relations; and, as stated above, hypochondria. Much has been written about isolation and its depressive effects on the islanders, and the folk themselves constantly complain of being shut off from the world and prey to wind, rain, fog, and raging sea. But isolation need not lead inevitably to depression, for my wife and I conducted research in another island of Ireland—far distant from and even more inaccessible than Inis Beag—where the inhabitants do not feel isolated and are not depressed.

I have expanded the clinical usage of the term hypochondria to include fears of the spirit as well as fears of the body, for ill health can as often be induced by supernatural forces, and death—whether by disease, injury, or aging—is the ultimate fear with its threat of eternal damnation. Colds, influenza, dyspepsia, migraine headaches, teeth decay, the crippling effects of joint and muscle ailments, hypermetrophy, and mental illness are paramount among health concerns. "Flu" epidemics are frequent in the island and are a chief cause of death among people who have become weakened by old age. As the folk advance in years, they come to spend more time in bed and by the turf fire and venture out less during the winter and when it rains. Drafts are avoided whenever possible, and clothes dampened by seas which wash the canoes or by rain are changed for dry ones at the first opportunity. Colds, flu, indigestion, and headaches more than any other afflictions send the islanders to the nurse for drugs and to their own folk remedies for relief. Dyspepsia is known as "wind" and is thought to result from diet, but the nurses say that most cases of indigestion are the result of tension—"nervous stomach." Nine cases of migraine were reported in Inis Beag during 1959, but many other islanders, most of whom are women, suffer from "nervous headache" which can approach migraine in intensity of pain. Neither my wife nor I were ill during the winter of 1959 and 1960, even though we were abroad in all sorts of inclement weather against the advice of our neighbors; when we began picking wild garlic to season our food, it was reasoned that the condiment afforded us protection against the flu, which reached almost epidemic proportions that year, and as a result this folk medicine was used more widely and consistently than usual.

Nativists and primitivists praise the health and hardiness of the folk and boast of the absence of rheumatism and allied infirmities among them and the sharpness of their sight. But, just as most adults past 30 years of age suffer from decay and loss of teeth, they also suffer from muscle and joint ailments, caused by the "damp and cold," and from far-sightedness. It is not known how many folk wear glasses in the privacy of their homes, but only two persons, both men, wear them publicly—and self-consciously when they do. Most glasses are not prescription made but are purchased in mainland shops after many pairs displayed on the counters have been tested, and often a single pair will serve the needs of all the elders of a household. The islanders among themselves constantly complain of these and other ailments, although some will praise the health and hardiness of the local

the major source of their livelihood; production is mainly for subsistence and is carried on with a simple technology, using the digging stick, spade, and scythe as primary implements; the island folk participate in a money economy, but barter still persists; a low standard of living prevails, and the birth rate is high; the family is of central importance, and marriage figures prominently as a provision of economic welfare; the island is integrated into the county and national governments and is subject to their laws; the people have long been exposed to urban influences and have borrowed cultural forms from other rural areas on the mainland, integrating them into a relatively stable system; and, finally, the experience of living under English rule for centuries has created in the islanders an attitude of dependence on—yet hostility toward—government which continues to this day. The only conditions in Inis Beag which run counter to those found in most other peasant communities are low death and illiteracy rates and bilateral, rather than unilineal, descent (although inheritance is patrilineal).

Inis Beag culture also characterizes people of nearby islands, and the traditions of the several together might be regarded as forming a subculture of the total Irish system. Many island customs are shared with rural peasants on the mainland (where numerous regional subcultures exist), and some are part of a broader European matrix. The island has experienced considerable cultural change since the establishment of the Congested Districts Board (forerunner of the Gaeltacht) in 1891 and the growth of tourism in this century. But conditions there still approximate those which must have prevailed two generations ago, and earlier, throughout this region of peasant Ireland.

Inis Beag has a population of approximately 350 persons living in seventy-one "cottages" distributed among four settlements, called "villages." Bordering a "strand" and a large tract of common land on the northeastern side of the island are a series of limestone terraces, separated by water-bearing shales and faced by small cliffs, on which the villages are situated. Most of the arable land is found on this side, where the shales have been broken down by weathering and alien soils deposited by wind and by ice of the Weichsel glacier. Over many generations, the islanders have deepened these soils and created new soils on rock surfaces by adding seaweed, sand, and human manure. On the southwestern side of Inis Beag, known as the "back of the island," limestone pavements slope rather evenly, almost as the gentle dip of the strata, from the crest of the highest terrace to the sea a mile away. The bared surfaces are intersected in all directions by crevices,

Sex and Repression in an Irish Folk Community

Many kinds of behavior disassociated from sex in other societies such as nudity and physiological evacuation, are considered sexual in Inis Beag. Nudity is abhorred by the islanders, and the consequences of this attitude are numerous and significant for health and survival. Only infants have their entire bodies sponged once a week, on Saturday night; children, adolescents, and adults, on the same night, wash only their faces, necks, lower arms, hands, lower legs, and feet. Several times my wife and I created intense embarrassment by entering a room in which a man had just finished his weekly ablutions and was barefooted; once when this occurred, the man hurriedly pulled on his stockings and said with obvious relief, "Sure, it's good to get your clothes on again." Clothing always is changed in private, sometimes within the secrecy of the bedcovers, and it is usual for the islanders to sleep in their underclothes.

Despite the fact that Inis Beag men spend much of their time at sea in their canoes, as far as we could determine none of them can swim. Four rationales are given for this deficiency: the men are confident that nothing will happen to them, because they are excellent seamen and weather forecasters; a man who cannot swim will be more careful; it is best to drown immediately when a canoe capsizes far out in the ocean rather than swim futilely for minutes or even hours, thus prolonging the agony; and, finally, "When death is on a man, he can't be saved." The truth of the matter is that they have never dared to bare their bodies in order to learn the skill. Some women claim to have "bathed" at the back of the island during the heat of summer, but this means wading in small pools with skirts held knee-high, in complete privacy. Even the nudity of household pets can arouse anxiety, particularly when they are sexually aroused during time of heat. In some homes, dogs are whipped for licking their genitals and soon learn to indulge in this practice outdoors. My wife, who can perform Irish step-dances and sing many of the popular folk songs, was once requested to sing a seldom-heard American Western ballad; she chose "The Lavendar Cowboy," who "had only two hairs on his chest." The audience response was perfunctory and, needless to say, she never again was "called out" to sing that particular song.

The drowning of seamen, who might have saved themselves had they been able to swim, is not the only result of the sexual symbolism of nudity; men who were unwilling to face the nurse when ill, because it might have meant baring their bodies to her, were beyond help when finally treated. While my wife and I were on the island, a nurse was assaulted by the mother of a young man for diagnosing his illness and